

was frozen, and a large iron bolt, doubtless from some ⁴⁸⁴
wreck, served as a crowbar to dig holes for the stakes. The
encampment was on a hill-side, near a low swamp, which ^[56]
furnished abundance of water, such as it was.

We had scarcely settled down, and I was dreading the ⁶²⁴
stagnant monotony of camp life, when darkness was dis-
pelled in a most unwelcome manner. Knots of Indians
could be seen in murmuring conversation, whose glances
betrayed the heat of their passions. They were again get-
ting impatient of my life, and carmen and fatigues were of
no avail to stem the rising tide. On the evening of the
third day, I was summoned out of the lodge by the chief, and
followed him in silence, with a trembling presentiment of
evil. He led me to a spot where twenty or thirty leading
spirits in the tribe sat ranged in a circle, — the fatal ring
was once more set to ensnare me! Once I had escaped.
Was it possible to effect a second escape? Everything
said no. The chances seemed a hundred to one against it.
What had I left unaid, to tempt their cupidity, to excite
alarm, to make them value my safety or dread the effects
of harming me? I could think of nothing, and the dismal
prospect benumbed every faculty of my soul. But, as I
entered the ominous circle, an access of fresh strength, the
courage of desperation, enabled me to bear up with energy
against perplexity and fear; to resolve that I would meet
them with a steadfast eye and an inflexible mind, — a force
which, though springing out of weakness, should prove
stronger than their utmost malice.

Having seated myself near the chief, the consultation
began and proceeded much as before, but with increased
vehemence. Their demonstrations were alarming, but, to

• 604 my joy, the chief took the same view as in the former council. Would he be able to restrain their savage tempers? His power was great, but there was a limit to its effect, and I feared. In my turn I sought to enforce his views, by arraying all the motives invention could produce, and was able to perceive that they had some weight. Again the matter was canvassed around the ring. There was a hesitation, as if they felt suspicious and unsatisfied. Then they began to cross-examine me: my promises were not explicit enough. What did I mean to give them? The answer did not content them; they wanted more. More or less made no difference to me, and I gave them assurance of all the good things they craved, when we should arrive at Holland. Another talk followed, and brought them to a pretty unanimous conclusion, that they would get the presents first, and *decide my fate afterwards*; — a "squeeze-your-oranges-and-throw-it-away" policy, in which these rascals seemed to be remarkable adepts.

123 The natives had no idea that I could understand their talk, and I was not at all eager to display my acquisitions. In fact, though unable to speak their jargon, my ear had become pretty well trained to interpret it, while my scraps of half Spanish enabled me, without suspicion, to hear, mark and digest, much of their conversation. This was, in part, acquired in teaching some of them, the youth especially, to speak English and to count, — a pursuit in which I engaged partly for their benefit, and partly for my own. Besides aiding me in learning their language, it tended, so far as it diverted their attention, to keep mischief out of their heads, after the manner in which constant employment maintains order in a ship's crew. It added to my know-

the next day running about and giving line upon line to the most influential of the tribe, and succeeded, as I thought, in awakening a degree of enthusiasm to move towards the place where all these good things were to be got. In confirmation of this, I had the satisfaction of being called at night to attend a solemn council. 000

It was a peaceful gathering, — they left their weapons behind, — but it contemplated only a sort of preliminary inquiry; the Patagonians know how to make their forms of procedure as tedious as any of our courts of law, summary as are many of their dealings. They examined and cross-examined very strictly, sifting my story with a severity which showed that they were in earnest, and at the same time a little suspicious. It was necessary to be on my guard at all points; and if they had been more docile learners of arithmetic, and able to stick on questions of number and quantity, it might have been a harder matter to satisfy them. But, on the whole, the old story was stuck to with a degree of consistency that produced the desired effect. Their confidence was perceptibly raised, and, after a good deal of talk, the council adjourned, every one more than ever disposed to visit "Holland." 624

While at this encampment, I observed on the ground about a dozen large oyster-shells, that appeared to have been recently opened. These were the first and only shells of the kind I saw in the country. I inquired if they were plenty in that vicinity. They said they were not; none of the tribe seemed to know where they came from, or anything about them. The chief said that he and his people did not relish oysters, but other Indians ate them. He did not like fish of any kind; no fish had grease enough for them; and none of his Indians ate fish. 262